

**REMARKS**

Claims 1 - 7 are currently pending in this patent application, of which claims 1 and 7 have been amended and claim 8 canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. Claims 1 and 7 are independent claims.

At the outset, the applicant thanks the Examiner for indicating that claims 3 - 5 and 8 would be allowable if re-written in the manner suggested in the fourth full paragraph on page 4 of the outstanding Action.

However, the following rejections are set forth in the outstanding Action:

(1) claims 1 and 7 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Masui (U.S. Patent No. 6,556,523) in view of Kato (U.S. Patent No. 6,272,089); and

(2) claims 2 and 6 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over Masui in view of Kato and further in view of Sugie (U.S. Patent No. 6,498,773).

The applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of these rejections.

U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/615,386  
Reply to OA dated April 17, 2007  
Amendment filed September 17, 2007

In order to help expedite the processing of this patent application to issuance, the applicant has amended independent claims 1 and 7 so as to incorporate therein the allowable subject matter of claim 8. Thus, the rejections of claims 1, 2, 6 and 7 are now moot; and claims 1 and 7 (and claims 2 - 6, which depend from claim 1) should now be similarly allowable.

In view of the above, the withdrawal of the outstanding rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Masui (U.S. Patent No. 6,556,523) in view of Kato (U.S. Patent No. 6,272,089), and the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) based on Masui in view of Kato and further in view of Sugie (U.S. Patent No. 6,498,773) is in order, and is therefore respectfully solicited.

In view of the aforementioned amendments and accompanying remarks, claims 1 - 7, as amended, are believed to be patentable and in condition for allowance, which action, at an early date, is requested.

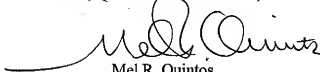
If, for any reason, it is felt that this application is not now in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the applicant's undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below to arrange for an interview to expedite the disposition of this case.

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In the event that this paper is not timely filed, applicant respectfully petitions for an appropriate extension of time. Please charge any fees for such an extension of time and any other fees which may be due with respect to this paper to Deposit Account No. 01-2340.

Respectfully submitted,

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PATENT TRADEMARK OFFICE

Enclosure: Petition for Extension of Time